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ABSTRACT

Through a review of literature, this paper notes that journalism has been fulfilling several elements considered crucial in the language arts program for many years, more richly and more understandably for students than many traditional English composition courses and other writing classes. In view of this, and in light of the many educational reform commissions' directives, a one- or two-semester journalism course should be considered a worthy writing course in either the college bound or the general curriculum. The paper then examines several concerns raised by the commissions about language arts, writing's role in learning, writing competencies fulfilled in journalism courses, research related to journalistic writing, problems with English education, programs for English educators, and the reform movement and nonwriting journalistic competencies. In conclusion, the paper recommends that the credibility of journalism as a vital part of the language arts curriculum needs to be studied and that evidence supporting that part needs to be widely disseminated; that high school journalism classes need to attract and keep good teachers; and that press associations on all levels need to become active in disseminating research and concerns of journalism educators to influential groups and decision makers. (FL)

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JOURNALISM'S ROLE IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EDUCATIONAL REFORM MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

JOURNALISM'S ROLE IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EDUCATIONAL REFORM MOVEMENT

The contention is made, through a review of contemporary literature, that journalism has been fulfilling several elements considered crucial in the language arts program for many years, more richly and more understandably for students than many traditional English composition courses and other English writing courses. The stance advocated is that in light of the many educational reform commissions' directives, a one- or two-semester journalism course should be considered a worthy writing course in the college-bound or general area of the curriculum.

Journalism, of all that is offered in the language arts, is one of the key basic courses--it has relevance; it has built-in objectives; it is transactional; it applies various liberal arts theories learned in other disciplines; it invites high level decision-making; it brings to life the need for the study of English grammar, usage, spelling, style, syntax; and it can be one of the most rewarding language arts experiences a student can have in school.

Examined in the paper are commissions' concerns about language arts; writing's essential role in learning; writing competencies fulfilled in journalism; research related to journalistic writing; some contemporary troubles with English education; programs for English educators; and the reform movement and non-writing journalistic competencies.

Four recommendations are made: 1) The credibility of journalism as a vital part of the language arts curriculum needs to be studied formally, systematically and widely; 2) Evidence already available supporting journalism's place in language arts, and other evidence to be gathered, needs to be disseminated to educational leaders and decision-makers; 3) High school journalism programs need to attract and keep good teachers; and 4) National, regional, and state high school press associations should be active leaders in disseminating research and concerns of journalism educators to influencial groups and individual decision-makers. Likewise, they must continue to provide support services that promote and stabilize the goals of scholastic journalism.

JOURNALISM'S ROLE IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EDUCATIONAL REFORM MOVEMENT

In the wake of the various national and state educational reform commissions comes a forthright re-examination of what students have been learning in school, what they currently study, and what they should be studying in the future.

To many educators, these commissions have dealt a most uncomfortable blow because the message has been, in the main, critical. For language arts educators, criticisms have been levied in all traditional areas of concern: reading, writing, listening and speaking. This study will explore the extent to which journalism, taught as a course in the language arts program, might be considered as one of the best ways students might learn the writing segment of the curriculum.

The contention is that journalism has been fulfilling several elements considered crucial in the language arts program for many years--in many cases more completely, more richly and more understandably for students than many traditional English composition courses and other English writing courses. Although a case could be made for journalism as a substitute for several of these traditional English writing courses, that will not be done directly; however, the stance advocated here is that in light of the many educational reform commissions' directives, a one- or two-semester journalism course should be considered a worthy writing course in the college-bound or general area of the curriculum.

But journalism has fought an uphill battle seeking respectability

for several years. Because it has not been a mainstream course in the language arts curricula in most schools, few educators, other than those in the minority who teach it, understand what it has done and is doing for students as they learn to write. And with a general tendency to return to the basics, as advocated by several commissions, many administrators and English teachers have looked upon journalism as a frill elective course that could be one of the first to go.

Journalism, of all that is offered in the language arts, is one of the key basic courses--it has relevance; it has built-in objectives; it is transactional; it applies various liberal arts theories learned in other disciplines; it invites high level decision-making; it brings to life the need for the study of English grammar, usage, spelling, style, syntax; and it--despite the rigors of rewriting, hours of research and other demands--can be one of the most rewarding language arts experiences a student can have in high school.

1983 High School Journalism Teacher of the Year John Bowen of Ohio has said, "(N)o other course in the high school curriculum is more basic and more necessary than journalism."[1] But before exploring how journalism specifically fulfills many of the concerns of reformers, one must consider the rationale used by several of the commissions studying educational priorities.

Commissions' Concerns

The National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 published its now well-known treatise A Nation at Risk. One of the laments was that the secondary school curricula have become watered down to the extent that they are "homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose." Further, too

many electives have been mistaken for main courses, and too many students have gravitated toward a general program of study instead of a college preparatory program. Indeed, the "proportion of students taking a general program of study has increased from 12 percent in 1964 to 42 percent in 1979."[2]

The Commission claimed that today's high school students are not able to perform higher order intellectual skills. For example, in the language arts area, the Commission said that only 20 percent of the students could write a persuasive essay, while 40 percent could not draw inferences from the written material of others.[3] Further, the Commission cited College Board scores showing a virtual unbroken decline from 1963 to 1980, with average verbal scores falling more than 50 points on the Scholastic Aptitude Test.[4]

Iowa followed the lead of the National Commission on Excellence by forming two commissions of its own--one a legislature-appointed task force and the other a joint committee of the State Board of Regents and the Department of Public Instruction.

The Iowa Excellence in Education Task Force (of the Legislative Council) found that even though Iowa leads the nation in several academic achievement areas, such as top scores in ACT and SAT examinations, "(n)early every higher education institution in the state offers remedial classes to help students overcome academic deficiencies." Areas of greatest weakness were found to be reading, writing, mathematics and study habits.[5]

In the language arts area more specifically, the Task Force found a consensus that high school students left school with deficiencies in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and other intellectual

abilities directly or indirectly associated with aims of language arts departments: reasoning capability, intellectual curiosity, study skills, and general communication skills.[6]

As a result of commission findings, states have begun redefining objectives and the means to those ends. Two examples are offered here: Florida and Texas.

Journalism courses might be eliminated in Florida by 1987 because of the Raise Bill's increased graduation requirements that specify added courses in defined subject areas. Students who were once attracted to journalism will have to add more "basic" courses in order to complete their graduation requirements and to comply with fulfilling what is called a Governor's Diploma. A massive campaign launched by the Florida Scholastic Press Association in the spring of 1984 saved journalism (albeit temporarily) as a course of study that could be used as elective credit.[7] But the future of these electives is not altogether clear as a Course Code Directory of approved classes must be annually renewed.

Florida journalism educator Lynn Shenkman reported that several other states are following the similar procedures, and that after a review of professional literature and following discussions with administrators and educators, one can safely conclude that the federal and state commissions "have set back journalism education nationwide."[8]

However, on the brighter side of school reform, Texas guidelines now allow journalism to serve as a substitute for the fourth year of English in new graduation requirements approved by the Texas State Board of Regents. This option permits local school districts to allow

journalism to count in either the General/Vocational or Academic graduation plan.[9] However, it should be noted that strong journalism education proponents must be prepared to lobby with local school district officials in Texas to assure that such a substitution is made available.

Iowa educator and 1984 High School Journalism Teacher of the Year Rod Vahl has helped his school district retain journalism in the language arts curriculum, having called journalism a "'must' for any complete language arts program. Journalism must be considered a five-star priority because journalism offers a genuine, live program of studies that is unequaled in terms of educational benefits."[10]

Research, which will be explored in more detail later, also has shown these testimonials to be true empirically. A study of 425 high school journalism students in Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Miami has shown that "journalism courses should be taken more seriously as a valuable and necessary part of a high school curriculum" and that they could serve "right at the core of the required basic skills courses."[11]

In this paper a "journalism course" or "journalism class" is defined as a one- or two-semester plan of study in which the main thrust of students' learning is based on the study and application of traditional elements of journalistic reporting and writing. Publication of a newspaper, newsmagazine or yearbook is not necessarily a prerequisite, although in most instances this outlet is available. However, "journalism course" here implies a formal classroom situation in which 50 percent or more of the time is spent in formal learning activities supervised and directed by a teacher.

The teacher has the required background and academic credits to fulfill state journalism certification requirements--or possesses those capabilities in states where no certification of journalism teachers is required.

Within this context, the remainder of the paper will explore the role of writing in the thinking/reasoning competencies of students, various national and state commission statements regarding the role of writing, the manner in which a journalism course aligns itself with commission statements, the problems with contemporary writing curricula (as evidenced by research), research showing the effectiveness of journalism classes, what English teachers are doing to solve their difficulties in teaching writing (and how journalism teachers have been employing those techniques for many years), and some general teaching approaches. In the subsequent sections will be a discussion of values of journalism courses in areas other than writing, with some overall recommendations and observations in the concluding section.

Writing's Essential Role in Learning

Writing might be thought of as the key to learning; certainly "the best reason for writing in school is to learn."[12] As an active means of learning, writing needs to be used by schools to increase literacy levels and to encourage the students as active learners rather than passive storehouses.

And literacy must be thought of as more than the ability to read and write on simple levels; literacy implies "the ability to comprehend and to understand ideas and arguments to a degree that allows an individual to use them." Further, according to Theodore

Sizer in Horace's Compromise, the ability to understand basic arguments and ideas contained in social and political life implies the ability to present similar ideas and arguments orally and in writing--otherwise one could not adequately participate meaningfully in society.[13]

Similarly, other contemporary education scholars such as Ernest L. Boyer, who wrote the Carnegie Commission Report titled High School, have contended that students who are unable to write clearly are correspondingly unable to think clearly--thus, failing to adequately prepare themselves for roles in society. "The reasoning and organizing that underlie competent writing...are the foundation blocks for all subjects."[14] Several educational scholars also have contended that too much attention has been paid to reading, mathematics and science while the writing curriculum has suffered. However, as evidence is presented showing deficiencies in reasoning and critical thinking skills because too little writing is occurring across the curriculum, the "teaching of writing is assuming fresh prominence."[15]

Studies by the National Assessment of Educational Progress have supported this contention. This federally supported monitoring program found that high school students' inferential reasoning skills have steadily fallen, and linkage was evident between these deficiencies and poor writing. However, some encouragement was noted by the group because of the new emphasis on writing instruction.[16]

Sizer makes a case for writing by describing the importance of having a written record, usually in the form of an essay, in which thought patterns, "disciplined, self-conscious trial and error," further testing and revising of those thoughts, analysis and then

rethinking of one's ideas are committed to paper. This type of dissection of ideas is a permanent, unchanging record of one's thoughts--and the sequence of one's thoughts--and provides the opportunity to review at a later time.[17] Discussions, teacher-led lectures, and other strictly verbal activities in schools, while having merit, do not provide the same intrinsic opportunities for the learner that writing activities do.

Thus, Sizer has contended that since writing provides a record of unfolding ideas, it should occupy the center of all schooling. "Writing is not only an end in itself; (but also) it is a means by which a person can delve into his or her mind."[18] And in Sizer's model school, English would disappear as a subject and department in secondary schools in favor of "Inquiry and Expression." This area of study would deal with all kinds of communication, but it would deal most centrally with writing, "the litmus paper of thought."[19]

In terms of transfer of thought, other scholars such as Arthur N. Applebee, professor of education at Stanford and director of a national study of secondary school writing, has said that the permanence of the written word gives the writer time to revise and rethink. This allows communication because thoughts must be explicitly written so that meaning remains constant from writer to reader.[20] With a structure set up for organized discourse by writing, it enables new ideas, unexplored assumptions, and other critical areas of human thought to be elucidated.

Indeed, a writing course in school enabling one to think rationally might also clarify for students what they think. Clarence W. Hach, journalism textbook author and retired teacher, has said that

one of the imperative needs of students is the "ability to think rationally, to express their thoughts clearly, and to read and listen with understanding."[21] While this implies the contribution of an English class, Hach, also a former English department chairperson, has said "a good journalism class is a good English class."

Writing Competencies and Journalism

The many reform commissions have left a plethora of objectives, directives, conclusions, admonitions, and recommendations. Among them are various guidelines for the role of writing within the curriculum. While many educators disagree with the makeup, function, scope and ideologies of the various commissions,[22] most present and future directions in secondary school education will somehow be tied to commission findings. Accountability for what goes on in schools, educational outcomes as measured by test scores, expectations of students, structure and length of the school day and year, and other tangible items will continue to be examined.

In the writing area, a generally positive leadership seems to have been exerted by the commissions.

For example, Iowa's Excellence in Education Task Force found a substantial consensus of evidence that suggested elementary and secondary schools should "increase the amount of writing done by students by several orders of magnitude over what appears to be current practice."[23] It advocated much of the writing to come through English departments, but it also suggested that writing be emphasized throughout the entire curriculum.

The same commission concluded that students be exposed to a variety of writing tasks. Further, some writing should be done every

week, if not every day, according to the Task Force. "(A)nd high school students should experience six to eight major (four pages or longer) formal compositions per semester." [24] While critics of the commissions might recant such a quantitative approach to writing, at least the commission indicated its desire for writing to pervade several areas of the curriculum.

In fact, some educators have suggested that for any of the educational reforms to take place in the 1980s and beyond, writing emphasized across the entire curriculum is necessary and fundamental.[25]

New York, for example, is adding a writing test as a prerequisite to high school graduation; many colleges nationwide--even those with heavy science orientation such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology--are adding composition requirements; Florida has made writing competency a matter of state statute and has passed a law "to award extra money to districts that reduce class size in high school English courses and assign students at least one composition a week."[26]

But writing is difficult--and teaching/coaching writing is time-consuming, often frustrating, and physically demanding of teachers. As James R. Gray, director of the National Writing Project, has said, "Writing is the hardest thing we ask students to do...It's certainly the hardest language task: harder than reading, harder than speaking, harder than listening."[27] When considering the previously described role writing plays in the thought process, this statement of Gray is more fully understood.

In the National Commission on Excellence in Education's final

report, Five New Basics were introduced: English, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer science. And among the recommendations was that a minimum requirement for graduation from high school be four years of English.[28] Aside from this quantified approach were some specific objectives as well. All four are well covered in a good journalism class: "a) comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and use what they read; b) write well-organized, effective papers; c) listen effectively and discuss ideas intelligently; and d) know our literary heritage and how it enhances imagination and ethical understanding, and how it relates to the customs, ideas, and values of today's life and culture."[29]

Rather than quantify educational goals, Iowa's Joint Committee on Instructional Development and Academic Articulation suggested a unified set of competencies in the areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening, mathematics, reasoning, and studying. The goal was to provide competencies for life, work, and future education of current high school students; the committee relied heavily on goals set forth by the College Entrance Examination Board.[30] Six major writing competencies were listed by the Committee. While English was the primary subject in mind as the Committee made its recommendations, it is evident to those in journalism education that a journalism course most assuredly meets all six competencies well:

"* The ability to conceive ideas about a topic for the purpose of writing.

"* The ability to organize, select and relate ideas and to outline and develop them in coherent paragraphs.

"* The ability to write Standard English sentences with correct

sentence structure; verb forms; punctuation, capitalization, possessives, plural forms and other matters of mechanics; word choice and spelling.

"* The ability to vary one's writing style, including vocabulary and sentence structure, for different readers and purposes.

"* The ability to improve one's own writing by restructuring, correcting errors and rewriting.

"* The ability to gather information from primary and secondary sources; to write a report using this research; to quote, paraphrase and summarize accurately; and to cite sources properly."[31]

These competencies are quite similar to ones proposed by authors of Guidelines for Journalism Instructional Programs and Effective Student Publications that was endorsed by the Secondary Division of the Association for Education in Journalism in 1977. That report indicated that in well-taught journalism programs students should be able to gather and organize facts; evaluate information to distinguish between fact and opinion; develop reporting skills of research and interviewing; cover news and other subjects of interest to readers; eliminate propaganda, gossip, personal anger and poor taste from writing; and write with "clarity, fairness and attribution."[32]

Similarly, on the university level, a major report on curricular change and the future of journalism education published by the University of Oregon in 1984 lists fundamental competencies journalism majors should have. Among them are competence in the use of language (general literacy); competence in information gathering (ability to "systematically gather and use information from various sources"); and competence in media writing (ability to produce, write, and edit

messages for two or more types of media). From these competencies students are to gain skills in both synthesis and analysis.[33] On a more elemental level, good high school programs share many of these collegiate goals.

Research Related to Journalistic Writing

Just how well these competencies are met in either journalism or English in secondary schools needs further research; however, solid evidence, both empirical and testimonial, exists that makes some comparisons between the two.

Hach has said that teaching writing skills in a journalism class is easier than in an English class "because students have a sense of an immediate audience, an extremely important factor in communication." Further, he contended that students write better because they can understand the purpose in having their prose clear, precise, and accurate. In a typical English class, no matter how well taught, many writing exercises are seen as artificial and with no real purpose.[34]

Training in journalism, by contrast, sensitizes students in the meaning of words--and the impact they have when read by others. According to Hach, in few other places in the curriculum other than journalism are there opportunities to "develop a discipline which systemizes the relationship between language, facts, and human consumption.[35]

Doctoral research by John R. Blinn of Ohio University has shown comparisons of advanced placement and senior honors composition classes with journalism students of similar ability. In the 1982 study of students in 12 Ohio high schools, his data analysis showed that

"journalism writers made fewer errors in most of the writing skill criteria than do non-journalism students." Writing skill criteria included measures of information presentation and selection judgment, errors in fact, information omission, opening sentence, and editorializing. And in each of the areas there was a statistically significant difference between journalism and non-journalism students.[36]

Other significant differences between journalism and non-journalism seniors, in which journalism students had better test results, included skills in spelling, word selection for context, punctuation, agreement, and avoidance of redundancy. Blinn concluded that "findings of this study suggest that prior journalistic writing instruction and practice may influence certain expository writing skills of high school seniors."[37]

Evidence is also clear that when journalism is taken by students, they understand its purposive value. In a 1981 study by Koziol, 70 percent of the high school students responding indicated they wanted to continue in some communication-related profession because they could then use their writing, speaking and creative abilities that were discovered and nurtured in high school journalism class.[38] Students also indicated that they were inclined to take their first journalism course mainly to learn to write well.

The clear advantage of journalism over English, as indicated by students in the Koziol study, was that the journalistic techniques used provided an approach to writing that was clear, precise and understandable--while at the same time enjoyable.[39]

Koziol has subsequently taught journalistic approaches to writing

in traditional English courses with excellent results. "The simple reason for the success of this method is that students feel a motivation instead of a compulsion to write."[40] Students in the study found journalism to be an attractive outlet for their writing talents, which means that even though many journalism teachers are trained primarily in English, they have a "serious responsibility to answer student needs by implementing a successful journalism program."[41]

Some Troubles with English

Former Iowa high school students now in college have reported that if they could repeat any activities in high school, they would include work on publications.[42] While this might not be a direct vote for a stronger journalism curricular program, it does attest to the value journalistic writing plays in the minds of collegians.

In the same study of 639 college students who were Iowa high school graduates, respondents said they did not always receive feedback on their writing performance in English classes, and the "majority...thought that they should have been required to do more writing in high school."[43]

Perhaps part of the problem lies with teachers' heavy class loads. Many have more than 120 students per day; some have considerably more than that. Even if an English teacher were to assign one major piece of writing per week, and if that teacher spent only 10 minutes on each, at least 20 hours of that week would be taken up with reading and reacting to that single piece of writing from each student. Given a schedule of 30 hours per week of class time, several more hours to prepare for those classes, and many more hours to grade other sorts of quizzes and assignments, it is clear why a teacher of

English who has a heavy burden of work reading and responding to writing might not be able to perform at optimum levels.

However, another problem in the English education area is teacher training itself. "Most of those who teach English were trained to teach literature, not writing."[44]

Unfortunately, the demands on a teacher time-wise and the limited preparation in writing show when student perceptions are measured.

Students pick up subconscious messages from both teachers and administrators that writing doesn't count for much. A 1981 study by Applebee for the National Council of Teachers of English showed that only 3 percent of students' classroom time and 3 percent of their homework assignments involved the creation of a coherent paragraph. Further, tests were usually the short-answer and multiple choice variety.[45]

More than half of Iowa high school graduates now attending college rated their competencies in writing as less than very good or excellent, and the same proportion said they should have been assigned more writing while in high school.[46] The Task Force that did the study concluded that "(s)tudents are simply not engaging in these skills under conditions of meaningful feedback with sufficient frequency and rigor."[47]

The Third National Assessment of Writing in 1981 found that 17-year-olds nationally had problems with writing: only half could write a generally satisfactory piece of exposition; only 15 percent

could write a clearly persuasive argument; and only 7 percent said they regularly participated in such writing activities as searching for topics, creating multiple drafts, or revising based on comments of others--teachers and peers.[48] These types of prewriting, writing and post-writing activities are routine in a typical journalism class.

Remediation in writing has extended to colleges and universities across the country. The University of Northern Iowa has required a writing competency exam for graduation since 1978, and for the first three years more than half of the students could not demonstrate minimal competency. Perhaps that is why several sections of an English class that specifically tutors students for the exam are consistently full.[49] At Harvard University the faculty has been considering the addition of a remedial writing course. Such a course would include joining logical arguments, the use of evidence, word use, and tone. The director of expository writing there has said, "We're getting kids who lack basic skills...(t)here are kids who just can't handle a sentence."[50]

And no doubt these deficiencies will continue showing in college students based on 1984 research by Applebee of the three most popular 9th- and 11th-grade textbooks in seven subject areas. Most writing activities in those texts were merely sentence-level skills requiring word skills, multiple choice answers, and simple repetition of facts. While most longer writing assignments were optional, "(n)o more than 1 percent of the exercises provided a wider audience for student writing than the teacher.[51]

Programs for English Educators

Even with handling heavy class loads, working an inordinate

number of hours per week, and receiving inadequate compensation in terms of both remuneration and status, leaders in English education have shown a heightened interest in the teaching of writing.

Teaching the writing process has been the subject of most of the new excitement among English educators and advocates of writing used across all levels of the curriculum. It emphasizes pre-writing activities as well as thought processes that continue during the writing process. Grammar is taught in conjunction with composition rather than separately. Students are much more the center of learning activities rather than teachers. For example, students usually choose the topics, seek help from others in reacting to ideas and drafts, and then share finished writing with others informally or through publication.[52]

For the past decade, more than $5 million from foundations, local school districts, and state and federal funds have been pumped into what began in 1974 as the Bay Area Writing Project and now called the National Writing Project. Workshops, seminars and special classes for elementary and secondary teachers of writing have proven to be of great success in the 44 states at more than 116 sites where programs have been available.[53]

However, research dealing with the process method, with its emphasis on peer discussion, free writing, and revision, has shown that the approach fails to focus on specific problem-solving activities, the presentation of arguments, and backing up generalizations with facts.[54] The research by Hillock is further supported by Goldberg. Even with the phenomenal experiences among teachers in workshops that help their growth as much as the

students they will later teach, leaders of the Project have consistently refused to write a philosophy of writing "or even a fixed set of objectives for a program that is still changing."[55] Donald Gallehr, co-chair of the National Advisory Board of the National Writing Project, has said there are some common elements of excellent writing programs in schools, but it would be "a mistake to write a philosophy when we learned new techniques each year."[56]

While some empirical research already presented points out an interesting juxtaposition between journalism and the writing process movement in the English curriculum, a good bit of phenomenological evidence exists putting high school journalism into similar context.

For example, similarities exist between the two in that in journalism curricula the writing is student-centered, students select topics of coverage and concern to write about, they share work with each other in draft and final-editing stages, they seek help from peers in pre-writing and writing stages, and they often have their writing published.

Journalism educators have been using the writing process since the beginnings of formal high school journalism classes. Whether directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, they have taught successfully for so long because the writing process approach has naturally worked in the journalism curriculum. Further, in journalism, the criticism related to the National Writing Project's lack of stated objectives is non-existent because a definite structure exists in the journalistic progression from story conceptualization to final, edited finished product. With most journalism teachers holding majors in English or some other area,

an informal consensus exists among those who are in a position to compare teaching writing in a journalism class with teaching it in an English class: Journalism is the more satisfactory approach in helping students become better writers.

Writing in the Learning Process

With all the commissions at work recently, much attention has been paid to the way in which students learn. While this topic has been the subject of thinkers throughout the ages, it continues to be of value, especially in light of the many reform movements.

The contention here is that a journalism class, with its usual publication outlet, adheres to the highest level of intellectual activity. A good journalism course operates, through its teacher, on firm educational ground because of its built-in and logical dimensions, principles, values and complexities.

John Dewey, in 1916, wrote than education must emphasize the primary or initial subject matter, which is active doing. Most classroom activity, he said, involved subject matter that was "isolated from the needs and purposes of the learner, and so becomes just something to be memorized and reproduced upon demand."[57] Since learning and doing are inseparable in the journalistic class, this concern is met.

Similarly, contemporary thinker and educator Mortimer J. Adler has formulated some approaches to learning with the educator in mind. Despite the study of educational philosophy and psychology in their training, teachers often become the center of class activities instead of making sure students are functioning in active roles--teachers are "at best only instrumental causes of learning. The primary cause is

always and only the activity of the student's mind. When that cause is not operative, genuine learning does not take place."[58]

Schools ought not be places in which the primary activity is the transmission of data from teacher to student, but a place in which growth of the intellect takes precedence over all else.

In Adler's perspective, the failure of many of today's schools is grounded in student deprivation of the modes of learning and teaching that are essential to intellectual growth and vigor.[59]

Modes of learning, expressed by Adler, include: 1) acquisition of knowledge in subject areas of language, literature, and fine arts; mathematics and science; history, geography, and social institutions; 2) development of intellectual skills, all of which include thinking and learning; and 3) enhancement of understanding of primary values and ideas.[60]

Correspondingly, three modes of teaching Adler has suggested are 1) the didactic, in which teachers rely on lecturing, telling, recitations, quizzes, exams, and the like; 2) coaching, which involves the teacher, as himself or herself a veteran performer, supervising skill-seeking students. These skills, or habits, are often repeated so that permanency results; and 3) Socratic, or "maieutic," instruction, which involves the teacher as active questioner.[61]

A journalism class often functions on all levels at various times in a semester or school year. While Adler's concern was that many courses offered in school never proceed from the didactic or coaching levels, the advantage of a journalism course lies in its natural predisposition to be taught on all levels, and thereby affording its students the opportunity to achieve understanding. At the beginning of

a school term, teachers might need the didactic approach to introduce fundamental principles of journalism. Certainly much coaching is involved as students proceed to interview, report and write journalistic articles. On the Socratic level, many journalism teachers currently employ questioning techniques in seminar situations as they introduce ethics, law and editorial decision-making functions. In fact, those teachers who double as publications advisers often function on the Socratic level because their main role is to question, to probe, to stimulate so that student editors might discover their own solutions to problems involving journalistic problems.

In Adler's schema, these high-level discussions are welded by the leader-teacher, and materials discussed are either books other than texts or "productions of quality in other fields of art and thought."[62] While he might not agree that a journalism class operates on this level, student journalists do grapple with book and other artistic reviews, values, ethics, fairness, balance and aspects of thought pertaining to matters of public concern and importance.

Accentuating Adler's premises about modes of learning and teaching is Theodore Sizer in Horace's Compromise. For Sizer, qualities of the mind need time to grow, and these are developed when "engaging a few, important ideas, deeply. Information is plentiful, cheap; learning how to use it is often stressful and absolutely requires a form of personal coaching of each student by a teacher." However, this situation is not possible in many schools because of crowded classes and high student-teacher ratio.[63]

However, personalization is an attribute occurring frequently in journalism. Sizer has described the importance of self-esteem of

students in the learning process. Teachers who can work closely in learning situations with students will evoke from them positive learning predispositions. "We all work best for people we respect; we study well in school for teachers we admire; we admire and respect those teachers who know us as individual, worthwhile people."[64]

Teachers of journalism, who have also been teachers of English, have often commented on the difference between journalism and English in this regard: Most have said that journalism builds the type of personal relationships that are necessary for the type of learning conditions described by Sizer.

Journalism educators have observed several values of writing in the learning process, but they also perceive numerous far-reaching educational benefits that are similar to Adler's and Sizer's concepts of learning within the context of the school.

Rod Vahl, veteran journalism educator in Davenport, Iowa, has said journalism offers a realistic approach to mastery of communication skills. In contrast with typical English courses, journalism classes usually offer "one motivational force that no other course can--consistent publication of one's labors with the written word."[65]

Further, Vahl suggested that such a class alerts students to their total environment, which takes them from their personal concerns involving social groups, problems and classes and extends their "awareness and attention to events of the total world and effects these events have upon teen-agers."[66]

An Indiana journalism educator, Dennis Cripe, has found journalism to be more necessary within the school curriculum than ever

before. First, it is the "ultimate test" of education because few disciplines in school demand that students stand behind what they have written. "Fairness, balance, completeness all move out of the realm of the academic and become survival tools in the real world."[67]

Cripe has also contended that journalism forces students to apply their liberal arts backgrounds from other areas in the curriculum. In doing so, students put what they gather for articles into a meaningful context. In weaving together factual information--including sociological aspects, psychological considerations, and perhaps economic impact--student reporters apply what they have learned in other areas and apply it to articles. In these ways, they "define (their) own education and level of understanding."[68]

Similarly, John Bowen, journalism educator from Ohio, has called journalism study in high schools "intellectual survival skills for the '80s and beyond." For him, journalism teaches students to better recognize and appreciate the human condition--"to be empathetic and to care about people." Indeed, rather than being "fluff" skills taught in "frill" courses, "in the global village (in which) we now live, they are necessities."[69]

The Reform Movement and Other Journalistic Competencies

Thus far, most of the rationale for journalism within the curriculum has been centered on the role writing plays in its content. Based on research presented, that evidence alone would seem to suffice for its place in the curriculum; however, as has been seen in the examination of modes of teaching and learning--and upon some evidence of expert journalism teachers--journalism's role transcends the writing aspects. Competencies advocated by an Iowa task force are in

alignment with goals of good journalism courses. Interestingly, of 35 competencies listed in six general areas by the Joint Committee, at least 25 appear to be directly addressed by a good journalism course.

Besides writing, the other five competency areas that high school students should have proficiency in are reading, speaking and listening, mathematics, reasoning, and studying. No attempt will be made to show objectives or provide specific journalism lesson plans that prove this to be true. However, such lessons exist (and such objectives exist) in the journalism course as defined early in this paper, and they exist within many schools throughout the country. Of the competencies not thought to be directly addressed by a journalism course, several were thought to be indirectly addressed and will be described briefly later.

Within reading competency, these four items are usually directly handled in a journalism course:

"* The ability to identify and comprehend the main and subordinate ideas in a written work and to summarize the ideas in one's own words.

"* The ability to recognize different purposes and methods of writing, to identify a writer's point of view and tone, and to interpret a writer's meaning inferentially as well as literally.

"* The ability to separate one's personal opinions and assumptions from a writer's.

"* The ability to define unfamiliar words by decoding, using contextual clues, or by using a dictionary."[70]

Besides texts, many journalism classes often use great works of non-fiction to supplement formal readings in the principles and skills of journalism. And since non-fiction comprises about 90 percent of all

new titles published annually in the United States, this approach makes much sense, especially considering the lasting value of such reading habits among students exposed to those works. Also included in the journalism class are readings from major newspapers and magazines--other important life-long reading habits and skills. In learning to read these written works with discrimination, students develop an understanding of and appreciation for world, national, and local events of importance. A key area of journalism reading instruction also involves the keen ability to distinguish between fact and opinion--a skill particularly stressed in the journalistic approach.

Another competency area of Iowa's Joint Committee (and based on College Board guidelines) is speaking and listening. A good journalism course satisfies four of the five directly:

"* The ability to engage critically and constructively in the exchange of ideas, particularly during class discussions and conferences with instructors.

"* The ability to answer and ask questions coherently and concisely, and to follow spoken instructions.

"* The ability to identify and comprehend the main and subordinate ideas in lectures and discussions, and to report accurately what others have said.

"* The ability to vary one's use of spoken language to suit different situations."[71]

As Hach has claimed with regard to speaking and listening, the "basis of most reporting, of course, is interviewing, so students have to develop their capacity to listen carefully in order to report

accurately." He further suggested that most schools pay no attention to the training in listening--even though it has occupied a prominent place in language arts curricula for several years.[72] In a crucial and prominent way, journalism helps fulfill listening capabilities in a most real way.

Additionally, the interviewing situation of journalism students thrusts them into meaningful speaking activities--particularly as questioners. And it seems intuitively clear that "to report accurately what others have said" is an ultimate goal of the journalist, and thus an important objective of a journalism class.

The Joint Committee and College Board also have listed reasoning as a competency high school graduates should have. All five suggested are met in journalism classes:

"* The ability to identify and formulate problems, as well as the ability to propose and evaluate ways to solve them.

"* The ability to recognize and use inductive and deductive reasoning, and to recognize fallacies in reasoning.

"* The ability to draw reasonable conclusions from information found in various sources, whether written, spoken, or displayed in tables and graphs, and to defend one's conclusions rationally.

"* The ability to comprehend, develop and use concepts and generalizations.

"* The ability to distinguish between fact and opinion."[73]

Most journalism courses offer units in editorial writing, an area that seems particularly apropos within the reasoning competency guidelines, although several aspects of news and feature reporting and writing also apply. Of similar importance is journalism's ability to

sensitize students to the use of source materials in generating logical conclusions that are devoid of fallacious reasoning.

Studying is a competency area described by the Iowa Joint Committee and the College Board as a group of objectives that support the other five areas in that they help students learn how to learn. "Students are unlikely to be efficient in any part of their work without these study skills."[74] While it is true that several other courses across the curriculum address these study habits, it seems that journalism consistently addresses all six of them directly in an ongoing way:

"* The ability to set study goals and priorities consistent with stated course objectives and one's own progress, to establish surroundings and habits conducive to learning independently or with others, and to follow a schedule that accounts for both short- and long-term projects.

"* The ability to locate and use resources external to the classroom and to incorporate knowledge from such sources into the learning process.

"* The ability to develop and use general and specialized vocabularies, and to use them for reading, writing, speaking, listening, computing and studying.

"* The ability to understand and follow customary instructions for academic work in order to recall, comprehend, analyze, summarize and report the main ideas from reading, lectures and other academic experiences; and to synthesize knowledge and apply it to new situations.

"* The ability to prepare for various types of examinations and to

devise strategies for pacing, attempting or omitting questions, thinking, writing and editing according to the type of examination; to satisfy other assessments of learning in meeting course objectives such as laboratory performance, class participation, simulation and students' evaluations.

"* The ability to accept constructive criticism and learn from it."[75]

In the mathematics area of the Joint Committee's competency recommendations, journalism indirectly fulfills several of the seven listed. Journalism, in a most practical and important way, often uses basic mathematics in the reporting process--clarity depends on the accurate use of tables, graphs and numerical interpretation and explication.

Further, with regard to methods of mathematics and science, Hach has written that journalism students learn the scientific process because they must examine evidence in a systematic way before making arguments or generalizations (especially in editorials and columns). Also, the scientific method helps students critically examine the mass media in general by learning "to discriminate between facts and unsupported opinions, between inferences based on fact and those not; and to arrive at one's own rational generalizations."[76]

Some Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations

Assumptions seem to have been made by administrative school personnel that English writing courses are superior to journalistic writing courses. It has been the premise of this paper that that thinking is erroneous and that journalistic writing has as much, if not more, value as any other writing course in the language arts curriculum.

Specific journalism course objectives will continue to be created by individual teachers. However, it seems clear from this general review of literature that a journalism class has been, is, and can be a vital part of the language arts curriculum. Unfortunately, in light of "back to basics" movements encouraged primarily by the various national and statewide commissions, the journalism class has been interpreted by those not understanding its potential in the curriculum to be less valuable than a traditional English writing class. While a good case could be made for journalism to replace other English writing courses, no attempt is recommended. In light of the foregoing descriptions of journalism as a writing class within the language arts program, it is hoped that its rightful value in the curriculum will be supported in the schools.

In light of the review of literature presented and in light of other contemporary issues facing schools, the teaching profession in general, and journalism's role in the high school curriculum in particular, the following recommendations seem in order:

1. The credibility of journalism as a vital part of the language arts curriculum needs to be studied formally, systematically and widely.

Research done by Blinn, Koziol and others has been somewhat narrow in scope and needs extension. One avenue of exploration would be to work with ACT and SAT services to see what language arts and journalism information they have on hand. Another approach would be to create an exercise of holistic writing to be taken by a representative sample of journalism and non-journalism students and then graded by objective third parties.

Whatever is to be done in this area needs to be done soon. It is

clear that in order to achieve status and credibility among lawmakers and educational leaders, hard evidence must be in hand.

2. Evidence already available supporting journalism's place in language arts, and other evidence to be gathered, needs to be disseminated to educational leaders and decision-makers.

The evidence should and could take many forms: formal research papers in respected educational journals; speeches before lawmakers, school administrators, and influential parent groups; published reports of special commissions (such as the one currently studying this problem for the Journalism Education Association); and others as appropriate.

In the political and publishing arenas outside their own domains, journalism educators have not exerted their voices to a great extent. While much fine thinking and evidence is published in journalism publications and presented at journalism education conferences, seldom are such notions dissemination beyond the realm of those directly involved. Too much of the time, it seems, journalism educators do too much talking to and among themselves rather than with outside sources who control the structure of the curriculum.

In this regard, Tom Prentice, journalism educator from Texas, has suggested that teachers become involved with political lobbying efforts; send good student newspapers and yearbooks to decision-makers; join powerful teacher associations and enlist their help; make sure writing and reporting are done well in the curriculum; and communicate directly with those who make decisions.[77]

3. Attract and keep strong teachers in journalism programs.

At a time when teacher vacancies are rising sharply, salaries

are poor,[78] and other reward systems inadequate,[79] evaluation procedures tenuous, experienced teachers are leaving the profession, status is low, and school bureaucratic pressures are high,[80] it is difficult to attract intelligent, talented people to pursue teaching careers. It is also difficult to keep such people who are now educators.

Some states are initiating incentives for teachers in terms of salary benefits and bonuses; some local districts provide fairly attractive packages of compensation. However, economic and social conditions facing teachers of anything--including journalism, where extra pressure often exists to supervise student publishing efforts--are generally not attractive enough to appeal to potentially excellent candidates for teaching jobs. Conversely, talented journalism educators have media career options because of their special expertise and can find attractive offers in that world.

To keep talented teachers of journalism, Professor Robert Knight of Missouri has suggested that university journalism schools offer leadership positions in workshops and seminars to those professionals as a means of recognition and reward. Also, he has urged that universities sponsor continuing education opportunities for these veteran teachers so that they might be able to renew their abilities and learn new principles.[81]

This recommendation coincides with a similar recommendation of Iowa's Excellence in Education Task Force that urged for development of programs in career education, including internships, clerkships, research projects, and scholarships for workshops.[82]

4. National, regional, and state high school press associations should be active leaders in disseminating research and concerns of journalism educators to influencial groups and individual decision-makers. Likewise, they must continue to provide support services that promote and stabilize the goals of scholastic journalism.

Perhaps the most crucial of such groups is the state high school press association. Most of the 50 states have such organizations, but their reach and influence vary widely. In some states, directors are volunteer teachers who run the association, literally, out of their car trunks. In other states, sophisticated organizations--often housed at a major university--are afforded at least part-time professional personnel, office space and supplies, and a firm economic base.

In states where organizations exist, action can be taken by the groups to help lobby for positive educational legislation in the journalism area. They might also become active, through representation, at various state and regional administrative conferences by volunteering to sponsor sessions at those meetings.

Press associations must also provide ongoing support for the journalism educator by providing such services as newsletters, publication contests, awards for excellent students and teachers, consultations, and latest resource materials.

These four recommendations seem to demand immediate attention if journalism education is to continue to be offered in schools that have such curricula, and they ought to be considered in areas where journalism is not included as an option for students.

FOOTNOTES

[1]John Bowen, "More Than a Basic," School Press Review (Winter, 1984): 20.

[2]A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, April 1983), p. 18.

[3]Ibid., p. 9.

[4]Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[5]First in the Nation in Education. Final Report of the Iowa Excellence in Education Task Force (Des Moines: Iowa Legislative Council, 1984), p. 9.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Lynn Shenkman, "Excellence in Journalism," Florida Scholastic Press Association Newsletter (Summer, 1984): 2.

[8]Ibid.

[9]"Journalism Wins Approval in Texas," Southern Interscholastic Press Association Newsletter (October, 1984): 4-5.

[10]Rod Vahl, "Five-Star Priority," School Press Review (Winter, 1984): 22.

[11]Robert V. Koziol, "Future Trends in Journalism Education," School Press Review (February, 1981): 12-13.

[12]James Howard, "Recognizing Writing as the Key to Learning," Education Week, 5 September 1984, p. 16.

[13]Theodore R. Sizer, Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), p. 86.

[14]Gene I. Maeroff, "Teaching of Writing Gets New Push," The New York Times Education Winter Survey, Section 12, 8 January 1984, pp. 1, 36.

[15]Ibid., p. 1.

[16]Ibid., p. 36.

[17]Sizer, pp. 103-104.

[18]Ibid., p. 104.

[19]Ibid., p. 132.

[20]Lynn Olson, "Let Them Write: The Call for More Time on Task," Education Week, 5 September 1984, p. L12.

[21]Clarence W. Hach, "How Journalism Instruction Meets the 10 Imperative Needs," NASSP Bulletin 59 (February, 1975): 26.

[22]For other criticisms of recent educational commissions, see James E. Albrecht and Jerry Duea, "What Price Excellence?: The Iowa Experience," Phi Delta Kappan 65 (November, 1983): 211-213; Ernest L. Boyer, "Reflections on the Great Debate of '83," Phi Delta Kappan 65 (April, 1984): 525-530; and Chester E. Finn, Jr., "Toward Strategic Independence: Nine Commandments for Enhancing School Effectiveness," Phi Delta Kappan 65 (April, 1984): 518-524.

[23]First in the Nation, p. 12.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Maeroff, p. 37.

[26]Ibid., p. 1.

[27]Olson, p. L12.

[28]A Nation at Risk, p. 24.

[29]Ibid., p. 25.

[30]See, for example, Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1983), pp. 12-15; and Educational Excellence for Iowa. Final Report of the Joint Committee on Instructional Development and Academic Articulation in Iowa (Des Moines: Iowa State Board of Regents and the Department of Public Instruction, February, 1984).

[31]Educational Excellence for Iowa, p. 13.

[32]Ruth Dowling, Nancy Green and Louis E. Ingelhart, Guidelines for Journalism Instructional Programs and Effective Student Publications (Urbana, Illinois: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, 1977), pp. 4-5.

[33]Planning for Curricular Change in Journalism Education. Project on the Future of Journalism and Mass Communication Education (Eugene, Oregon: School of Journalism, University of Oregon, 1984), p. 82.

[34]Hach, p. 26.

[35]Ibid.

[36]John Robert Blinn, "A Comparison of Selected Writing Skills of High School Journalism and Non-Journalism Students," Dissertation Abstracts International 43, Section A, p. 3,146 (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio University, 1982).

[37]Ibid.

[38]Koziol, p. 12.

[39]Ibid., p. 13.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid.

[42]First in the Nation in Education, p. 64.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Maeroff, p. 36.

[45]Ibid.

[46]First in the Nation in Education, p. 9.

[47]Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[48]Olson, p. L12.

[49]First in the Nation in Education, p. 9.

[50]Suzanne Daley, "Colleges All Over the Country Turning to Remedial English," The New York Times Education Winter Survey, Section 12, 8 January 1984, p. 38.

[51]Olson, p. L54.

[52]Maeroff, p. 36.

[53]Ibid., p. 37.

[54]Olson, p. L54.

[55]Mark F. Goldberg, "An Update on the National Writing Project," Phi Delta Kappan 65 (January, 1984), p. 356.

[56]Ibid.

[57]John Dewey, "The Nature of Subject Matter," in John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings, ed. by Reginald D. Archambault (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 363-364.

[58]Mortimer J. Adler, Paideia Problems and Possibilities (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1983), p. 23.

[59]Ibid., p. 16.

[60]Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[61]Ibid., p. 17.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Sizer, p. 89.

[64]Ibid., p. 66.

[65]Vahl, p. 22.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Dennis Alan Cripe, "We Are What We Write," School Press Review (Winter, 1984): 21.

[68]Ibid.

[69]Bowen, p. 20.

[70]Educational Excellence for Iowa, p. 13.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Hach, p. 26.

[73]Educational Excellence for Iowa, p. 14.

[74]Ibid.

[75]Ibid.

[76]Hach, p. 30.

[77]"Journalism Wins Approval in Texas," p. 5.

[78]Jerry Heth, "Warning of Teacher Shortage," Iowa City Press-Citizen, 30 November 1984, p. 1.

[79]A Nation at Risk, p. 30.

[80]Alec Gallup, "The Gallup Poll of Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Public School," Phi Delta Kappan 66 (October, 1984): 98.

[81]Robert P. Knight, "Scholastic Journalism is of Age," (Paper presented to the Secondary Education Division of the Association for Education in Journalism Annual Convention, East Lansing, Michigan, August 1981), pp. 13-14.

[82]First in the Nation in Education, p. 58.